

Statement from the family of James Leavelle

James Robert Leavelle, the Dallas police detective who was handcuffed to alleged JFK assassin Lee Harvey Oswald when he was shot by Jack Ruby, passed away Thursday, Aug. 29, 2019, shortly before noon. He had broken his hip in a fall a few days before and died due to complications after the surgery.

Leavelle had spent the weekend at his daughter's house in Colorado, celebrating with his 99th birthday. He was joined there by his three grandchildren and great grandson.

While we mourn his passing, we celebrate his life, one that seemed to find history. He was also at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, aboard the USS Whitney when the U.S. naval base was bombed by Japan, precipitating the U.S. entry into World War II.

But in our family, he was simply "grandpa."

"He was the quintessential grandfather," said his son-in-law Robert Griendling, who is married to his younger daughter, Karla Leavelle. "Our three children adored him for his kindness, sense of humor and his unwavering support and encouragement he always gave to our children."

"Dad was a disciplinarian and instilled in us the confidence to reach for the stars," said Karla Leavelle. "A simple man of modest means, he thought we could do anything we put our mind to. He was also a kind man and loyal friend to those he loved."

His granddaughter Kate, a television producer, created, wrote and co-produced a documentary in 2013 called "Capturing Oswald" that chronicled how the Dallas police apprehended Lee Harvey Oswald in 88 minutes after the Kennedy assassination.

"He always emphasized that what he enjoyed most about his police work was helping people," Kate Griendling said.

"We had a very special bond that survived the many political arguments between a southern and his Yankee granddaughter," she said. "And I'll always treasure our trip to Hawaii to remember Pearl Harbor and our return to the site of the World War II hospital where he met my grandma."

Leavelle was married to the former Taimi Trast for 72 years before her death in 2014 at age 95. She was an accomplished woman herself, working as a nurse for more than 50 years. They met when he was returned to the States from his ship in 1942 after an on-board accident. She was part of the team that cared for him. Because she was an officer and not allowed to have a relationship with an enlisted man, she resigned her commission to marry Jim.

Jim made time for everyone, including the hundreds of strangers who would call, write or visit him just to interact with the man who was so much a part of our shared history.

The family would like to thank all those who've offered condolences and to those who loved and cared for him as he lived independently to the very end. He had a large circle of relatives and colleagues from the Dallas Police Department and other law enforcement agencies who watched over him.

James Leavelle is survived by his daughters Tanya Evers and Karla Leavelle and his two granddaughters Kate Griendling and Hunter Griendling, his grandson Zack Griendling, and his great grandson Revel James McMillen, who was named after Leavelle. He was predeceased by his wife Taimi Leavelle and his son James C. Leavelle.

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